6: Fortes E-5 (1934-1937) 1937 FE11 Tallensi FE11



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227 The technique of fishing is simple. The men move to and fro all the time in the centre of the pool: the women form an irregular circle round the men and keep to the shallow periphery. Men use hand nets (*wok*) suspended from a single, strong withe bent in a roughly elliptical hoop, about 18 in. by 8 in. They scoop at random. If a fish is netted a quick twist of the wrist secures it in the bottom of the net, where it is dispatched with blows of an axe-shaft or the fist, and then hung from the man's waist on a string threaded through the gill cleft. Large nets (*pal*) of similar pattern, 8 or 9 feet long and manipulated by two men, are also employed, but the proportion of these is extremely small. Women use a heavy, beehive-shaped plunge basket (*soyar*) about 2 feet high made of withes lashed together about 2 inches apart at the open end of the trap. At the top of the trap a circular aperture four inches or so in diameter is left, while the bottom, open end is about twenty-seven inches across. The women plunge this down on to the bed of the river every few minutes and insert a hand through the top aperture to extract the fish. Their catch goes into a small basket slung from a shoulder. Whereas men often land a big fish, women seldom catch anything above the size of a large herring. The natives explain this by pointing out that the biggest fish will naturally seek the deeper water in the centre of the pool, which is occupied by the men. Only fish escaping to the periphery will come the women's way.

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571 The manual skill involved is however of secondary significance. Sociologically, the essential fact is that fishing is a group activity. Everybody fishes with and against his neighbour, his motor alertness and competitive cupidity at the highest. The excitement is indescribable. The glint of a fin through the water, brown with the mud churned up by the slow moving mass of men, causes a scrimmage. Pushing and shouting, a dozen men plunge their nets after the fish. In a well stocked pool the terrified fish leap out of the water, a fantastic and beautiful sight. Hands and nets swing out after the leaping fish, and the older men who remain on the bank watching call out with eager delight at the sight. The first catch of the day is greeted with a shout of pleasure, not very welcome to the fortunate fisherman, however, for the fish thus noticed cannot escape confiscation by the owner of the pool, as it is the ritual perquisite of the fetish.

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579 Disputes are inevitable and may become violent. The rule is that a fish belongs to the person who nets or traps it. But a fish may be netted by one man, escape, and be at once netted by another, or a leaping fish may be pinned between two nets. Such incidents lead to an angry altercation in which the one who has the fish generally gets the better. Once a quarrel over a fish occurred between a man of the *Namoos* group and one of the *Tallis* group. The latter ran ashore with his fish followed by the *Namoos* claimant. In a few minutes a small riot had broken out. *Namoos* and *Tallis* rushed out, snatched sticks, branches of trees, fishing nets, and flew at each other. Only the intervention of a brother of the Chief of Tongo stopped what might have become a serious fight. The dispute over the fish in this case was the signal for an outburst of political hostility. Words quickly lead to blows in such an atmosphere of heightened muscular and emotional tension.